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Syrians Aiding Heroin Traffic In Bekaa Valley

The Syrians aren't clinging so stubbornly to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley just to protect their flank against Israeli attack. They're also protecting a multibillion-dollar drug traffic involving top-ranking Syrian military and civilian officials.

High-quality hashish and heroin are smuggled out of the valley through Syria to various western capitals. The smugglers are given safe passage by the Syrian military in exchange for payoffs.

From intelligence sources, my associate Indy Badhwar has obtained a confidential report that details the whole story. The highlights:

- A pivotal role in the dope traffic is played by the Syrian secret service, Al-Istikhbaratt As-Souriat, also called the SS. The SS brought in Turkish experts to grow opium poppies in the Bekaa Valley. The SS uses the money from drugs to bankroll terrorist attacks and to recruit and control spies, as well as line its own pockets.

- Like Chicago gangsters in the 1920s, Syrian generals have carved out their own exclusive territories to

keep things on a businesslike basis. One dust-up occurred between two rival generals, Mohammed Ghanem and Ghazi Kenaan. Terms of a "peace-treaty" gave Kenaan the take from smugglers in the Lebanese city of Shatura, while Ghanem exacts tribute at the Syrian border post of Al-Massna.

- The northern Lebanon truck routes are controlled by Syrian security chief Rifaat Assad, President Hafez Assad's younger brother. His minions share income from the northern drug roads with Ali Eid, an Alawite Moslem agent in the port of Tripoli. The drug convoys, under Syrian army protection, travel the roads from Baalbek, Lebanon, into Syria through the remote village of Sarghaya.

- Syrian military helicopters have been used to ship tons of hashish from the town of Nihaa in the Bekaa Valley to Syria, whence it goes to Europe. Drugs bound for Alexandria, Egypt, are shipped from the Syrian-controlled Lebanese port of Anfa aboard the ship "Hassan," under the watchful eye of Syrian agent Mustafa Al Farass. Last summer, Egyptian officials seized 3,200 kilograms of Bekaa Valley dope.

- The list of officers enriching themselves from the drug trade is a veritable "Who's Who" of the Syrian army. Fingering in the intelligence report were Syria's defense minister, Mustafa Talas, and Army chief Hik-

mat Al-Shahaby. They were reported to be dealing with Syria's top drug dealers, Ahmad Mustafa Al-Lakkiss and Hussein Abdel Ghani Tleiss.

- One top drug dealer, Jamil Abdel Karim Hamieh, from the Bekaa Valley village of Taraya, receives full Syrian military protection. "When his car passes through a Syrian checkpoint, the Syrian soldiers do not dare stop it or question him," the report states. "Hamieh also has close ties to defense minister Talas."